



## GREENWICH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

### Public Meeting – Public Input Summary

Project Number: 222123.02

Location: GCS Elementary Gym

Date: November 15, 2022

Time: 5:00 PM

#### Meeting Summary:

The first public event for the Greenwich Comprehensive Plan update was held on Tuesday, 11/15 from 5-7 PM at the Greenwich Central School (GCS) Elementary School gym. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an overview of the Comprehensive Plan process, review preliminary findings, and get public feedback on three core plan topic areas: housing; parks and recreation; and agriculture and open space. Participants were divided into three groups for topic-focused "breakout sessions"; the groups spent 20 minutes at each topic breakout area. The following is a summary of the public feedback from the event, organized by topic area.

#### Housing

- Short-term rentals (STRs):
  - Participants felt that there were not many STRs in Greenwich, and that they are less of an issue in Greenwich than in other communities because there are no hotels locally that they are impacting.
  - Participants discussed the benefits of STRs to local businesses.
  - Participants were open to a permitting process to better understand and stay ahead of STRs but were not supportive of additional regulations.
- Recent housing development:
  - Participants felt indifferent about recent housing development and did not note any recent development that had a negative impact/they did not like. Participants noted that "there's a lot of room" and everything is being built tastefully.
  - There have been no major subdivisions in the past 20 years; participants discussed one that was never completed and noted that another recent one benefitted from the fact that each building was developed by a different developer so it felt less "cookie cutter."
- Future housing development:
  - Participants universally felt that future housing development should be focused along the Route 29 commercial corridor (close to amenities), with a particular interest in more mixed-use, townhome, apartments, and senior housing along the corridor.



- Extending water infrastructure is needed to support housing development along the corridor.
- Potential for a residential overlay along/adjacent to the corridor to further incentivize residential development.
- Mention of properties behind Sunshine Inn and Hannaford as ideal for additional residential development
- Several participants felt that the Big Lots plaza would be an ideal location for mixed-use infill development.
- Preference for housing to be concentrated/not sprawled throughout the community.
- Participants suggested that, for housing in the Town's rural/agricultural areas, there should be incentives to encourage clustered development to minimize land clearing.
- Interest in encouraging townhouse construction in both the Town and Village.
- The other Town hamlets (Battenkill, East Greenwich, Cossayuna, etc.) are all located along major roadways that are often narrow, making access difficult. Participants did not feel that additional development should be located in the other Town hamlets.
- Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU)
  - Participants were supportive of ADUs, which are currently permitted in the Town but not identified/regulated in the Village code. ADUs/barn conversions should be permitted in the Village.
  - Participants noted the many barns in the Village that could be converted to ADUs but that parcel size constraints limitations in the Village might make it difficult to construct new ADUs.
- Senior Housing:
  - Participants universally felt that senior housing is a high need and stressed the importance of locating them near amenities/services.
- Other:
  - Participant noted that substandard/dilapidated housing in Greenwich exists but is hidden.
  - Participants stressed the need for more rental options/apartments for both seniors and young people moving to the area but noted that the design of the apartments is important.
  - Participants felt that affordable housing is needed for both seniors and families.

## **Parks and Recreation**

- Promoting Existing Resources
  - Most participants were unaware of all the parks and recreational facilities available. The Denton Sanctuary and Livingston Brook Heron Rookery were frequently mentioned as parks that people were not familiar with. Mill Hollow was frequently mentioned as a park that is difficult to find.



- Several participants noted that they were worried about trespassing when visiting some parks due to lack of signage clearly stating that the area was a park and not private property.
- Many participants felt that parks are underutilized due to a lack of awareness, signage, and general maintenance of trails.
- Active Recreation vs Passive Recreation
  - Participants were thankful for the natural beauty at many of the parks but also commented on a lack of active recreational facilities. One participant noted that most parks feel like "underdeveloped forests."
  - Adventure parks, playgrounds, skate parks, and places to roller skate were all mentioned as things people would like to see.
- Waterfront
  - Several participants noted that existing waterfront access points are difficult to find, and many people only know of them through word of mouth. A few participants liked the idea of secrets places for the locals, but some long-time residents that engage in activities on the water were unaware of access points, particularly Mill Hollow.
  - Participants said better maintenance at existing water access points is needed, and additional access points should be added if possible.
  - A few participants supported the idea of building a clean water pool in the river at the former Town Beach to bring swimming back. Many participants agreed that swimming access was a great asset.
  - Water levels on the Battenkill are a concern for many residents that partake in recreation on the water. They suggested an agreement with the dam operator to ensure water does not drop below a certain level would resolve that issue.
- Thunder Mountain
  - Most participants said they would like to keep Thunder Mountain accessible for recreation. Several participants said they go to Thunder Mountain to mountain bike. One participant rides their horse there and noted it is one of the few places they can do that. Several participants hike there.
  - Some participants noted they worry that timber and logging operations may negatively impact recreational opportunities at Thunder Mountain. Some participants seemed open to sharing the space with timber and logging operations if an agreement is in place to maintain recreational access as the site's primary use.
  - A few participants seemed interested in the idea of starting a volunteer organization to help develop and maintain a trail system at Thunder Mountain.
  - A few participants mentioned competing uses on the trails will need to be managed.
- Access and Connectivity
  - Many participants noted that several parks are not accessible without a car.



- Most participants were very interested in developing a trail system to connect parks and recreational areas to each other and the Village downtown. Some examples of connections requested:
  - Pedestrian bridges and connections from Rock Street Park to Main Street
  - A trail from Thunder Mountain to the former beach and general walking/biking access to the former beach
  - Develop a trail on the unutilized railway from the Dunbarton Site to the Empire State Trail and Hudson Crossings Park.
  - Trails or bike lanes connecting the Empire State Trail to Main Street.
- Recreation as an Economic Development Tool
  - Many participants were interested in using recreation to attract visitors, particularly bicycle tourists on the Empire State Trail.
  - Participants noted there are few places for people to spend the night if they are travelling through the area on the trail system. Short term rentals or a hotel were suggested.
  - Several participants mentioned it would be beneficial to have commercial activities like ice cream stands or small shops near recreational areas and trailheads. This would enable people to "make a day" out of visiting recreational facilities in Greenwich.
  - Participants supported the idea of adding branded maps and business directories at popular recreation sites along with branded wayfinding throughout the Town and Village.
  - One participant works at a tourist welcome center in Schuylerville and supported the idea of collaboration to make both communities a destination on the Empire State Trail.
  - Participants noted they didn't think that overcrowding or too many visitors would be an issue if parking at trailheads is managed well. As one participant put it: "bring them on"
- Other
  - Culture – The blue group came to a consensus that Greenwich is full of people that work outside but don't play outside. They were interested in building a culture that supports playing outside.
  - Brownfield sites – a participant noted that brownfield sites may be an opportunity for pocket parks and public spaces. A suggestion of a public space with games and space for small vendor stalls was generally met with support.

## **Agriculture and Open Space**

- Legacy of Farming
  - Where will the next generation of farmers come from? Attracting youth is challenging. Woofing is popular in Europe and may be a way to introduce young people to agriculture. However, this typically performed on small organic farms
  - There is a consolidation of farms, especially noted in Easton.
  - Participants noted that farming is a lifestyle choice.



- Amish farmers are present growing crops, raising livestock, and using sawmills/creating lumber.
- SUNY Adirondack does not offer ag programs, and Cobleskill is the local choice for those pursuing agriculture.
- Economic Viability of agriculture
  - Participants noted the challenge to maintaining the economic viability of farming.
    - Labor shortages
    - Challenges of connecting to markets
    - Fragmentation of farmlands
    - Loss of dairy/grazing lands. There are fewer dairy farms.
    - Farm sizes are shrinking. Large equipment is not always adaptable to the smaller farm sizes.
- Agricultural Lands for Housing
  - Participants discussed the challenges of providing a housing lot(s) for children and family members
  - Are there ways to cluster housing, avoid high value soils, and share resources across landowners?
- Agricultural Lands as Open Space
  - Agricultural lands are the dominant landscape and helps portray the image of Greenwich as farm community.
  - There is a concern about solar impacting the landscape as well as contributing to the loss of agricultural lands.
- Loss of high value agricultural soils/lands is a concern
  - Participants discuss the Town's solar law, which requires protection of highly productive soils
  - There are some ag lands that lay fallow that me be suitable as grazing lands for sheep or other fiber producers. Are they accessible?
  - Land leases are working and several participants lease lands to ag users.
- Greenwich is fortunate to have a wide variety of agricultural uses and a wide variety of support mechanisms for agriculture
  - Agriculture Stewardship Association is active in preserving lands. One of the participants' properties is subject to an ag lease. There is a concern that the program is not adequately funded year to year
  - Cornell Cooperative Extension is active, as is the FFA.
  - Cannabis is appearing locally (Hebron & Argyle?).
  - Fiber and apiary are growing opportunities



- The Greenwich Community is supportive of the agricultural community, celebrating with the Tractor Parade and other functions

### **Other**

- Participant noted the need for the Comprehensive Plan to evaluate existing infrastructure and recommendations for improvements/expansions.
- Participant noted the need for the Comprehensive Plan to provide economic development recommendations and also discuss the implications of cannabis-related businesses.